



THE THEATRE OF ABSURD

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ABSTRACT

The theatre of Absurd depicts the universe which has lost his meaning and purpose. The dramatist of the Absurd drama finds the universe and everything in to be arbitrary, disconnected and irrelevant. In this type of Drama, dramatist asks the question what is the meaning of life and get the answer that there is a No meaning of Life.

KEYWORDS: Absurdity of Language, Depression era, Harold Pinter, Reality.

INTRODUCTION:

The theatre of Absurd started in the early 20th Century by a group of dramatists who considered themselves intellectuals and wanted to show their reaction to the realistic dramatists of the 19th Century who were very popular in their time. The Theatre of Absurd was a reaction against the realistic drama of the 10th Century. Gradually this movement became very popular among the audience of the time. Martin Esslin made from popular. He wrote a book entitled Absurd drama which propagates the theory and principles of Absurd Drama. Many dramatists like Samuel Beckett, Eugene O'Neil, Arthur Adamov, and Edward Albee etc wrote many absurd plays which became very popular among the audience. Although it declined in the 21st Century but still even in our age there are some dramatists like Herold Pinter, who wrote Absurd plays. In this paper we will discuss the definition of Absurd plays, a brief history of Absurd Movement and chief characteristics of the absurd drama.

The Theatre of Absurd is a term derived from Albert Camus's essay 'The myth of Sisyphus' clear and lucid thought on the subject of Absurd drama which is found in the Martin Esslin's book 'The theatre of The Absurd' in which the dramatist ask the questions "What is the meaning of Life?". And get the answer, "There is a No meaning of Life."

This term is applied to a group of dramatist in the 1950's who did not regard themselves as a school but who also seemed to share certain attitudes towards the predicament of men in a universe. The Absurdist play writes believes that our existence is absurd because we are born without asking to be born, we die without seeking death. For them life is essentially meaningless hence miserable. There is a no hope because of a futility of men's effort; reality is unbearable unless relieved by a dreams and illusions. A man is fascinated by death which permanently replaces dream and illusions.

It was Camus who first realized the absurdity of a human existence during the Second World War and gave expression to the meaninglessness in his novel and drama. Camus defines the absurd as the tension which emerges from man's determination to discover purpose and order in a world which is both purposeless and disorderly.

The theater of absurd is contemporary form of drama. The irrationality nature is emphasized here and man's isolation and loneliness are the central element of the theatre of absurd. Absurd means senseless, illogical, irrational and contrary to a common sense. The best example of this kind of drama is Samuel Beckett's 'The Waiting for Godot', another example of this kind of drama is Arnold Wesker's 'The Kitchen' and Harold Pinter's 'The Birthday Party' and 'Care Taker' and 'Home Coming'.

The Absurd Drama:

Absurd drama is the drama which treats human life and human situation as absurd unfit or foolish. It is a drama without traditional plot, story into acts and scenes and it has fewest possible characters. In this type of drama dialogue are short and crisp. The playwrights try to communicate the meaninglessness of the light through dialogue. In this type of drama things are not explain, they are merely hinted or suggested.

One of the major features of an absurd drama is the lack of action. Either nothing or very little happens in this type of drama. In an absurd drama, the characters are in a constant quest for their identities. The situation in which the characters are in absurd drama is the situation in which we all are. There is mixture between reality

and unreality. The final situation is absurd or comic. The absurd drama is not purposeful or specific as it solves no problems. It is like an absurd painting which is not supposed to convey a definite meaning. The most surprising thing about plays of this group is that in spite of breaking of their rules they are successful.

In this type of drama, the style of play writing, presentation, convention of structure, plot and characterization are over looked in the form of play. Characters appear in a different forms and identity may lead to a change of sex, age and personality. The presentation may have no fixed or determinable setting and even the sequence of time is definite.

Edward Albee, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter and Arnold Wesker are play write of this generation; among them Samuel Beckett was a well known practitioner of the Absurd drama. He was an Irish dramatist who wrote both in French & English with ease and facility. He uses deliberately formless language to present the meaningless experience, However the attracted attention by his master piece "Waiting for Godot". Here are examples of Absurd drama which are the best in their contemporary time.

"Waiting for Godot" is one of the most important works of our time. It revolutionized theatre in the 20th Century. The Play is in two acts and also has major characters named "Estrogon" and "Vladimir", both converse on a various topic and reveal that they are 'Waiting for Godot' who never arrives while they wait two other characters enters Pozzo is on his way to market to sell his slave Lucky. When they leave, a boy enters and tells Vladimir that Godot will not be coming tonight but he will surely come tomorrow. The next night also they both wait but Godot does not come. So finally Vladimir and Estrogon decide to leave but they promises to perform action but always fail to do so and they do not move.

Vladimir and Estrogon voice the existential crisis of human beings who don't know 'why they put on earth' but they have assumption that there must be some reasons of their existence.

Everyone wants to know the purpose of their existence and they seek an answer which is both rational and mystical and looked at to Godot for enlightenment. This crisis has been seems the very beginning of the human existence.

Nobel Prize winning play write Herold Pinter, is one of the Britain's finest contemporary playwrights who wrote 'Home coming'. It has been considered as one of the best examples of the absurd play. This play very clearly presents the horror and meaninglessness in modern times. Pinter gives a shock to his audience not only by its manner of presenting sex and prostitution but also by the inexplicable motivation of its character. The action centers on the suffocating relationship within one London family. The play has six characters. 'Max' a retired Butcher, spends a large part of the first act railing against life's disappointment. 'Sam' a Chauffeur who is brother of Max and worked as a motor driver in his youth. 'Lanny' who appears to be a pimp and younger son 'Joey'. The play concern 'Teddy', a university professor and 'Ruth' his wife's Home Coming. Teddy brings his wife 'Ruth' from America to meet his father, uncle and brother after an interval of nine years.

Pinter leaves the characters unexplained and there are number of questions for example, 'Is Sam homosexual?' Why should a woman, the mother of three children and a wife of an American college professor should calmly accept the proposal of becoming a prostitute. Has the play being written by a playwright to give a shock to the audience only for the sake of giving a shock and for no other rea-

son? All these things are possible yet never certain in a play that is both naturalistic and absurd. Thus it has different symbolic and thematic implication.

Essentially, these playwrights were reacting against realism because it did not align with their objectives. They did not want to show life as it really was, but rather, the inner-life of man—what was going on inside his head.

“The Theatre of the Absurd merely communicates one poet's most intimate and personal intuition of the human situation, his own sense of being, and his individual vision of the world.”

It is rightly said that the silences in a Pinter's plays are more vocal and communicative. Home coming by Harold Pinter has been considered as one of the best example of the absurd play. An absurd drama, presents a static situation that has no dynamism in it. Another important feature of the Absurd drama is the sub situation of an inner landscape for the outer world. An absurd drama endeavors to carry the onlookers into the psychological realism of the characters rather than to present the other spectacle of the world. Before the audience or onlookers the mental recesses of the protagonist unfolded, parading the fear and menace.

The third one, Arnold Wesker's 'The Kitchen' are not very least considered in comparison of both previously. This is a play about a large kitchen in a restaurant called 'Tivoli' in the basement. There are thirty chief waitress and kit potters slowly began the day preparing to serve a lunch. The central story is about frustrated love affair between high spirited young German Chef Peter and married English waitress Monique.

During the rush hours everybody around the restaurant goes insane. There are the pretty quarrel grumbles, false pride and snobbery. The kitchen staff hates dining room staff and all of them hate customers. They believe the customer as a personal enemy.

Wesker is of the opinion,

“The world might have been a stage for a Shakespeare but to me it is a kitchen where people come and go and can't stay long enough to understand each other. Friendship: Love and Enmities are forgotten as quickly as they are made.” (Arnold Wesker. The Kitchen, 5)

The absurd drama plays with situation that is painful and violent. We cannot identify ourselves with its character. It appeals to a deeper level of the mind of the audience. It challenges the audience to make a sense of nonsense; to face the situation consciously rather than feel it vaguely and perceive with laughter and pathos the fundamental absurdity of our lives. Such a theatre then presents anxiety and despair, sense of laws at the want of situation, illusions and purposefulness.

The play tries to communicate a vision, instead of a story or a theme through an elusive static image or through a complex pattern of images. It does not present argumentative dialogue that leads us to a conclusion. It projects a poetic image that conveys a mode of being or an atmosphere which does not yield to logical analysis. We are not expected to ask the question what will happen next but rather what is happening here or what human significances does it have for us.

Obviously the theatre of absurd is a theatre of situation as against the theatre of events in sequence. It endeavors to parade sense of being; it can neither investigate nor solve the problem; In this sense it is not dramatic at all, in as much as it no conflict or tension; climates or crisis denouement or conclusion. If at all there is a tension; it emanates from an elaboration or unfolding of the image rather than from its name or plot.

By 1962, the theatre of absurd seemed to have spent its force. This form of drama fell out of favor with its exponents. In short absurdist drama is outdated and can be at the most remembered as a liberating influence on conventional theatre, if we compare the absurd drama with other drama, the difference seems to be immense.

Here I compare Esslins quote for Absurd drama in which Esslins says,

“If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story. These absurd drama have no story or plot to speak of. If a good play is judged by subtly or characterization and motivation. These are lien without recognizable character and present the audience almost with mechanical puppets. If a good play has to have a fully explained theme which is neatly exposed and finally solved. These often have neither a beginning nor an end. If a good play is to hold the mirror up to nature and portray the manners and mannerism of the age in finely observed sketches. These seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares. If a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue. These often consist or incoherent babblings.” (Martin Esslin. The Theatre or the absurd. 21-22)

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